

Shenzhou XVIII's post-1980 astronauts set for launch

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The three post-1980 generation crew members of the Shenzhou XVIII mission said on Wednesday that their similar professional backgrounds and mutual trust will help them complete all the objectives set for the mission.

Inside The Long March 2F rocket carrying the astronauts. See more aboard the Shenzhou XVIII spacecraft **page 3**

from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Northwest China at 8:59 pm on Thursday, Lin Xiqiang, deputy director of the China Manned Space Agency and spokesman for the mission, said during a news conference on Wednesday at the launch center.

The crew members are Senior Colonel Ye Guangfu, who is the mission commander, Colonel Li Cong and Colonel Li Guangsu. Ye was also a crew member of the Shenzhou XIII mission that returned in April 2022, while Li Cong and Li Guangsu will be making their first spaceflight.

Ye, 43, said that unlike his first mission, which was full of excitement because it fulfilled his dream of becoming an astronaut, this trip will require him to bear greater responsibility as mission commander.

Nonetheless, Ye said while meeting the media at the launch center on Wednesday, "Every mission to space is a new start."

"Besides recovering, I also had to return to training in the past two years. And the structure of the space station is new to me and more complicated to operate. Also, leading a team is another new challenge," he added.



Crew members of the Shenzhou XVIII mission Ye Guangfu (center), Li Cong (right) and Li Guangsu meet the media at a news conference at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center on Wednesday. WANG JIANGBO / FOR CHINA DAILY

All of the crew members were trained as pilots in the People's Liberation Army Air Force and share other similarities in age and experience, said Li Cong, who is 34.

"To ensure the smooth running of the space station with complicated operation systems, all the operations must be precise, and the mutual trust of the crew members is required," he said.

Li Guangsu, who is 36, will be responsible for conducting experiments in space. He said he is looking forward to experiencing life in weightless conditions.

"Besides work, I also want to take

a good look at the beautiful blue planet and our country. Furthermore, I want to see if the stars do twinkle, for my child," he added.

Lin, the China Manned Space Agency deputy director, said the main objectives set for the mission include the handover of the space station from the Shenzhou XVII crew and carrying out a series of experiments and missions during the new crew's six-month stay.

According to the plan, the Shenzhou XVIII crew members will return to the Dongfeng landing site in late October.

During the mission, the country's

first in-orbit aquatic ecological research project will be carried out. Using goldfish algae and zebrafish to establish a self-cycling aquatic ecosystem in orbit, the aim of the project is to make a breakthrough in the cultivation of vertebrates in space, Lin said.

Cang Huaixing, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Technology and Engineering Center for Space Utilization, said the experiment could help people build aquatic ecosystems and food-producing systems in space in the future.

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Xi hails shared space progress

Beijing willing to boost partnership with Latin America and Caribbean, he says

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China is willing to work with Latin American and Caribbean countries to deepen cooperation in space programs for the interests of their peoples, President Xi Jinping said.

He made the remark in a congratulatory letter sent on Wednesday to the first China-Latin American and Caribbean States Space Cooperation Forum.

Xi wrote that the event could provide a starting point for China to join hands with nations in Latin America and the Caribbean to form a high-level space cooperation partnership, promote the use of space technology to bring more benefits to the peoples, and continue to advance the building of a shared future.

Noting that this year marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the China-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) Forum jointly initi-

ated by leaders of both sides, Xi said that China and Latin American and Caribbean countries have seen prosperous development over the past decade in their cooperation in various fields.

Their relations have entered a new era that features equality, mutual benefit, innovation, openness and prosperity for the people, the president added.

"I am happy to see that China and the Latin American and Caribbean countries have yielded fruitful results in space cooperation in recent years. New progress continues to be made in the fields of remote-sensing satellites, communication satellites and control station networks for deep-space programs. Such advancements have played an important role in promoting scientific and technological research, strengthening regional connectivity and improving people's livelihoods," Xi wrote.

Vice-Premier Zhang Guoqing read

out the president's letter on Wednesday at the opening ceremony of the two-day forum, which is being held in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, and is co-hosted by the China National Space Administration and the Hubei provincial government.

Letters from Honduran President Iris Xiomara Castro Sarmiento and Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro were also read out by their respective ambassadors to China.

The two presidents congratulated the forum's opening and expressed their hope that it could help to enhance the comprehensive collaboration in the space field between China and their nations.

Government officials, diplomats and scientists from 27 Latin American and Caribbean countries, as well as representatives from the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs and other international organizations took part in the forum, which had a main symposium on Wednesday and four workshops set for Thursday.

Chinese and foreign participants were scheduled to discuss a wide range of topics including space sci-

ence and technology, training for professionals, lunar and deep-space exploration, and space governance.

The event was intended to implement President Xi's instructions on the China-CELAC Forum, foster space cooperation among involved parties, facilitate the growth of the space industry in Latin American and Caribbean countries, and strengthen the friendship and partnership between China and related nations, the China National Space Administration said.

China has been cooperating on space exploration with some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean for many years. It helped Venezuela build and launch all of the South American country's three satellites; worked with Bolivia on the construction and deployment of its only satellite; and placed several satellites jointly built by Chinese and Brazilian researchers into orbit.

The latest development took place on Wednesday in Wuhan, with the space administration announcing that Nicaragua has signed up with the International Lunar Research Station project initiated by China.



Shenzhou XVIII astronauts Ye Guangfu (left), Li Guangsu (center) and Li Cong participate in a training session on extravehicular activities on Jan 15. XU BU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Mission: Crewed lunar program advancing smoothly

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Besides continuing to recruit and train Chinese astronauts for upcoming space and lunar missions, China will also promote the participation of foreign astronauts and space tourists in flights to the space station, Lin said, adding that China is confident that its space station will welcome more new members from different backgrounds in the near future.

Lin also said that China's crewed lunar exploration program is progressing smoothly, with the development of major component systems, such as the Long March 10 carrier rocket, the crewed spacecraft Shenzhou, the lunar lander Lanyue and

Know the astronauts on Shenzhou XVIII mission

Ye Guangfu

Senior Colonel Ye Guangfu, 43, a first-grade astronaut, is the mission commander of the Shenzhou XVIII spaceflight, which is scheduled for launch on Thursday.

Ye, who is from Chengdu, Sichuan province, joined the People's Liberation Army in August 1998 and was assigned to a fighter jet regiment after graduation. He became a first-grade pilot at the combat unit.

In May 2010, Ye was selected as a member of the second group of astronauts for the PLA Astronaut Division. He took part in a survival training session in Italy in July 2016 that was organized by the European Space Agency, and was a member of the reserve crew for the Shenzhou XII mission.

the lunar landing suit, having been completed, with prototype production and tests being carried out.

In 2023, crewed lunar exploration was approved by the central

government for launch and implementation, with the aim of landing Chinese on the moon by 2030.

The plan is to launch two carrier rockets to send a crewed spacecraft

Li Cong

Lieutenant Colonel Li Cong, 34, a fourth-grade astronaut, will be making his first spaceflight on Thursday.

Li, who is from Handan, Hebei province, joined the PLA in September 2009.

He was a second-grade pilot and deputy group commander of a PLA Air Force fighter jet brigade before

being selected as a member of the third group of astronauts for the PLA Astronaut Division in September 2020.

Li Guangsu

Lieutenant Colonel Li Guangsu, 36, a fourth-grade astronaut, will be making his first spaceflight on Thursday.

Li, who is from Peixian county, Jiangsu province, joined the PLA in September 2006. He graduated from the Aviation University of Air Force.

Before he joined the PLA Astronaut Division's third group in September 2020, Li was a first-grade pilot and deputy group commander of a PLA Air Force fighter jet brigade.

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and a lunar lander into lunar orbit. The spacecraft and lunar lander will dock with each other, after which the astronauts will enter the lander, Lin said.